

you have been taken over by the monsters by jakepurralta

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Summary:

The voices inside of Jonathan's head became like monsters, familiar voices that not only liked to feast on his suffering but also destroyed what little capability he had left to enjoy things. So when Nancy reveals that she has feelings for him, it leads to an emotional response.

1. i am starting to think that the monsters are falling for you

Author's Note:

A few days ago, I was thinking about Jonathan, and about how he might be suffering from depression. I began to think about how it could affect his social life and his love life, and this fic is the result of that very long train of thought. In fact, this fic is just a fraction of what I'm thinking about. It's just that I'm tired now and I'm a little proud of myself for writing a 4k+ fic in the first place. I just love him so much, he's so important to me, and that one time he cried in Stranger Things it took five years from my life span.

I cut it into two parts. If you want to get to the Nancy stuff right away, chapter 2's your destination.

His father made him kill a rabbit.

He cried for a week.

Lonnie Byers was never really a good role model to have, so the possibility of his children being emotionally fucked up was, of course, very feasible. Like a tiger slowly padding through the tall grass, eyes on the prize, inching closer and closer to its prey.

For a while, having Joyce around worked as some sort of counter balance to his abusive father.

But life was hard on the Byers, and Joyce started to have less and less time and/or energy for her kids. Jonathan never blamed her for it. Instead, he focused his energy on his younger brother, trying to distract him from their mother, who started to smoke and often looked like she was on the brink of a mental breakdown whenever she thought her children weren't looking.

Jonathan started to slip away from her parental vision, and he

deteriorated.

It wasn't an overnight, full-on crash to the cold, hard ground. Maybe that would've been easier to deal with. Maybe if that had happened, his mother would've noticed, and she could've helped him to get back up. But it was something much more sinister, like a demonic shadow that gradually bent around him until it managed to enter his veins and it became a part of him.

It started with him losing interest in the things that had once caused him joy.

- *When you grow up, you outgrow certain things.*

It was him often massaging the back his neck, groaning at his aching bones, though never loud enough for anyone else to hear. He wanted to be invisible.

- *I need a new mattress.*

It was negative thoughts swirling in his mind, starting to become familiar voices that downplayed all of his accomplishments.

- *You managed to talk to that girl. Unfortunately, she was just being polite. You'd never stand an actual chance with her.*

When he finally began to associate depression with what was happening to him, he was already too far gone.

Nowadays he always wakes up with a stale taste in his mouth, and an incredible fatigue in his limbs, no matter how many (or how little) hours have passed. He's always hungry, though he hardly has any appetite. Whenever he does eat, it's to keep up an appearance (and maybe not faint). He doesn't want to worry Will and Joyce.

Going to class becomes a chore because he feels like the whole world is talking about him behind his back. Logically speaking, he knows the world doesn't revolve around him, and some people are too busy dealing with their own shit to worry about him. But he's not entirely wrong, because when he walks by, some people intentionally raise their voice as they tell their friends that "the silent creep is at school

again" and it's followed by obnoxious laughing.

If it's not the bullying (both direct and indirect), he has to put up with looks of confusion (why is he the way that he is? why can't he just be normal and social like us?) and pity. He hates all of it.

But he finds a way to deal with it, which is to never look anyone in the eye. *Don't give them your attention.* He keeps his jaw clenched, his eyes front and his pace steady.

Will's disappearance doesn't completely spiral Jonathan into a full blown suicidal depression.

Jonathan is a family man. No matter what, Will and his mother come first. He doesn't have time to break down. He's going to get Will back, and he'll keep Joyce safe (from herself, mostly).

This terrible tragedy has actually given him some purpose in his life, and it makes him feel a little sick to his stomach.

What is happiness? Until recently, Jonathan had always assumed that it was merely the absence of sadness. It was figuring out how to rebuff the nasty thoughts that plagued him constantly to the far attic of his mind.

But the worst part was that this so called "happiness" was always temporary. The sadness, it was always there, always ready to jump back out, screaming:

"You don't belong here."

"They're just being polite."

"She's lying to you."

and/or

"You're wasting her time."

"-and your own. But *you* don't matter, so that doesn't matter anyway."

It doesn't take much to believe the voices.

2. but if you're willing to fight, i'll gladly too

Jonathan thinks to himself that he never expected to have someone in his life that he considered to be so thoroughly wonderful. Someone bold enough to wear their heart on their sleeve, who inspired him to maybe one day try to do the same. A person that wore a smile so exuberant, so beautifully graceful that the very stars in the sky probably felt jealous to look merely fair against them. It takes him a while to get there, but he realizes that it's love. He never thought that he would be capable of loving a person besides his mother and his little brother.

He found that person in Nancy Wheeler.

At first, he thought it was just a crush. Like when you see a pretty girl and just thinking about her makes your stomach tie in knots. You don't want to talk to her because you're afraid that you've lost all sense of speech. It made sense to him that he had a crush on her, Nancy was a very pretty and likable girl.

But he knows that crushes are supposed to pass.

His feelings for Nancy stayed the same.

He wanted to get to know her. He wanted to know if she was the kind of person he thought she was. But he never made a move, because he considered her to be so vastly different from him, like they came from different worlds. Plus, she seemed happy with Steve, and he wanted her to be happy.

But at long last - as fate would have it - their lives entwine. She starts giving him company in the darkroom and talks to him while he develops his photos. He reaches for her hand when something startles them. They go out shopping for guns to go monster hunting.

There's a monster in another dimension, terrorizing their usually peaceful little town, and Jonathan thinks about the fact that he's hanging out with Nancy, now.

It's so strange, he thinks, that he's now in a position where she's

making him laugh and he's making memories with her. She thinks it's strange, too.

But at the time, they didn't really have much time to think about it, not when lives were at stake. Not when Nancy was too busy grieving the loss of her best friend while also having to fight her PTSD, and Jonathan was occupied with trying to bury his family's hardships underneath thick layers of better memories.

The months pass by and life starts picking itself up. Jonathan thinks that things will go back to normal (i.e. he'll see Nancy in passing as he picks up Will from the Wheeler's house), but she actually makes an effort to build a friendship with him.

He doesn't think he deserves her company, but he feels bad for not trying, so he works on becoming a better friend to her. In the process, they share these weird moments that he doesn't quite understand. Like when they reach for things, their hands brush together momentarily, and Jonathan swears he feels a little jolt of electricity, and his heart races.

He also begins to realize that she doesn't take her eyes off of him when he looks down at the ground and laughs at the things she says. He was utterly clueless at first, but it starts occurring so often that even he can't help but notice.

It doesn't really matter anyway, because Nancy is still with Steve, and they seem to be solid. Steve even offered to hang out with Jonathan a couple of times, but Jonathan had always declined. He appreciated the fact that Steve was trying, but he was sure they would never really become friends. He thinks that maybe Nancy got Steve to ask him, but it's not necessary. Some people are just never meant to become friends.

The months turn into a year and Jonathan has just started to come to terms with the fact that if he wanted to remain friends with Nancy, he'd just have to put up with seeing Steve constantly.

So obviously it comes as a surprise to him when she's knocking on his door and she's telling him exactly what he always wanted to hear

when he first started developing feelings for her.

"I like you."

"'I like you' is such a terribly general way to phrase it, don't you think? It could mean anything." The rotten voice in his mind whispers to him, and Jonathan tightens his grip on the door frame, studies her, tries his best to silence the demons in his head. If he were to be completely honest with himself though, he knew full well that he was succumbing to the voices and he had no idea how to pull himself back from it.

She's looking at him expectantly, and he doesn't really know what to say, so he hears himself stammering, "I...like you too."

Throughout the years, he's taught himself how to deal with these thoughts. He did that by listening to music, spending time with Will, throwing himself into his photography, working...anything he could to avoid being alone with his thoughts. It worked during the day, but at night, he'd often find himself lying down in bed, feeling the ache in his chest and the thoughts in his head turned to screams, and he wished the world would just swallow him whole.

He never openly discussed the feelings that he had. Will was far too young to understand and provide suggestions for him to cope, he figured. His mother, Joyce, perpetually worried. About a lot. About how they were going to pay the bills that month, about Will's grades, about Jonathan's future, about her own abilities as a parent. He didn't want to burden her with his problems too, despite the fact that she'd occasionally gently pull him aside and tell him that he could always come to her if he needed to talk about anything. He knew she meant it and he'd always nod at that and insist that he was fine. Joyce never pressured him into talking, but a good mother knows, and Joyce is a good mother.

"Jonathan?"

Her voice pulls him back to the real world, where she's still standing on his porch, shifting her weight from one foot to the another in an attempt to keep herself warm. He finally notices the way she's actively trying to keep herself from violently shivering and quickly

steps aside to let her in. She's looking around the house as she wanders over to the living room, obviously still a little uneasy with being in the Byers's home. A year ago, she didn't even know what the inside of his house looked like, and now here she was, and they were close friends.

He follows her like a confused puppy, unsure of what to say.

She spins around, stares intensely at him with that fierce determination he so admired about her. "Did you hear what I just said?"

"Yeah. You said that you liked me." He's just stating the facts, playing it safe.

"Well, do you know what I meant with it?"

He looks away, opens his mouth and snaps it back shut. He thinks that he might know what it means, but it can't be true, can it? Nancy Wheeler doesn't *like* him. There's no way in hell.

She's waiting for some sort of response, but he can't give it to her. So a long silence stretches between them before Nancy lets out a sigh, and it makes him feel bad because now she has to spell it out for him like he's some kind of idiot. But he *does* need her to spell it out for him. For all the shit that his depression has given him, it has also kept him safe from being hurt and it's almost like he can physically feel his walls being built to keep her away from him, to not give her the power to destroy him.

Nancy sits down on the couch where Jonathan joins her, his hands in his lap, fingers fumbling nervously.

"I broke up with Steve," is the first thing that she decides to say. Makes sense, to immediately talk about the elephant in the room, get it out of the way. "I broke up with him a week ago. Since then, I've been thinking about a lot. About everything that had happened, about myself, about you, about...us. I started to think about how weird it was that we ended up becoming such close friends. I was thinking about how I'll never forget Barbara, but also how you kind of ended up becoming my best friend. You're always there for me

when I need you, and you seem to understand me more than anyone else I know, even my own family. I know that you like being alone, but I was thinking that I really enjoyed the times we were alone together, you know?"

Jonathan nods silently. He never minded her company either.

"I decided to listen to myself, *truly*. So I asked myself, 'do I really want to be with Steve?' and the answer was no. It took me a while to figure out why not, but the answer was always no. It was unfair to string him along, so I broke up with him. And you know who inspired me to do the things I thought were best for *me*? You."

That takes him by surprise to say the least. "Me?" It comes out very soft.

"You." She repeats matter-of-factly, with a nod of her head. She sucks in a deep breath before she turns her body to him even more to grab his full attention. "Because you matter to me, Jonathan. I don't even care how it happened, or that it might seem weird, but you're in my life now and you've inspired me to stay true to who I really am. I want to keep you, and to be honest, I think there's something between us."

She's telling him that he matters to her and he curses at his complete lack of self-control when it comes to his emotions when people tell him that he's not the incompetent waste of space he convinces himself he is. She's telling him that he matters to her and he starts to panic in the suddenly stifling atmosphere. His eyes start to brim with tears that are screaming to get out, his breath comes out in short, jagged bursts. *Fuck, not now. Not here, with her. I don't want her to see me like this.* Embarrassed, he jerks his head away from her and starts jiggling his leg. *Calm the fuck down, Jonathan.*

Of course she notices. He feels her place a hand on his thigh and he stops shaking. "Jonathan? Am I upsetting you?"

He doesn't reply right away. He just closes his eyes for a second, counts to five and takes in a few breaths to regain his composure. He then turns back to her, notices her worried eyes. He tries to smile, but it comes out weak and unconvincing. "You didn't upset me."

She starts to open her mouth, probably to ask him what did, so he continues with a somewhat bitter laugh as he lets his gaze fall to the floor. "I'm a mess, Nancy. I never thought that we'd ever end up becoming friends. I don't like most people, and I always thought that you were going to be part of that big group. I was fine with it. I was fine with being a mess on my own. I had my family. I figured, who cares if I never find friendship? That's overrated anyway. You can't depend on anyone but yourself and maybe the few good family members you have. Maybe this way of thinking saved me from a lot of pain. But now, you're here, telling me all these things, and you're going against everything I've been telling myself for the past few years. You're telling me something that nobody has ever said to me, and I can't help it, it's fucking me up a little."

He's still not looking her in the eyes and he knows that she's giving him that same look his mother gives him during those rare occurrences where he opens up to her about his true feelings.

He thinks she's gonna say his name again, which he doesn't really mind, because his name sounds beautiful on her tongue. Instead of that, though, she surprises him by putting the palm of her hand on his cheek, forcing him to make eye contact with her. "I *do* care about you. I don't know everything that's going on inside that head of yours, but if there are any demons you need to fight, you know I'll be right beside you. I want you to get to a place where you'll understand just how much I care about you and how much you deserve to be loved." She's stroking his chin with her thumb and his lips start to quiver, so he clenches his jaw fiercely, trying to hold it all in. A single tear manages to escape and rolls down his cheek.

She wipes it away and gently grabs a hold of his chin, pulling him down so she can press a kiss to his forehead. They've shared a bed together, they've hugged, and they've held hands, but this is still the single most intimate thing they've done. She has a forehead pressed against his and feels him trembling against her skin. "I hope you know that you can trust me."

He barely lets her finish her sentence before the gate breaks and he wraps his arms around her pressing her close to his body as the tears start to flow. He feels naked in her embrace and it's unfamiliar and immensely scary, but he also knows that the monsters have been

festering inside of him for years now, and he's sick and tired of it. For the most part, he's just so *tired*. He's tired of pretending like he doesn't give a damn. He's tired of constantly listening to the voices that tell him that taking care of himself doesn't matter.

She's holding him just as fiercely as he is holding her, and tries to focus his attention on the way her hands are rubbing circles on his back. Her heartbeat is calm and steady. He tries to match with his. A few minutes pass until Jonathan feels he has calmed down, though her shoulder is wet from his tears.

They pull away from each other. He hates the way he instantly misses her and wants to look away.

She doesn't let him. She puts her hand on his cheek again and makes him look at her. "Look at me, please." He does. "Do you trust me?"

He nods. "I do." The answer is just barely above a whisper, but it's enough to satisfy her and she offers him a gentle smile.

"I'm glad."

She sits with him for another hour and for the most part, they sit in a silence that's not entirely uncomfortable. He offers her something to drink and they attempt to make some small talk. They talk about the town, about their family, about school.

His eyelids feel heavy, Jonathan notes. It's not uncommon for him to fall asleep after he's been crying. Crying exhausts him, it always did. Nancy notices this and offers to walk him to the bed, which at first, he declines. "I can walk myself." He tries to say with a laugh, but his head bobs and Nancy insists.

She lets him lean on her a little as they make their way to his bedroom. He mutters something about the mess, which Nancy just waves off. Honestly, Jonathan's room is pretty typical. Dirty clothes scattered across them, the walls clad with various posters of musicians she doesn't all recognize, and his unmade bed, on which he drops himself, face first. It's ungraceful as hell and she can't help but chuckle at the sight. He grumbles in protest, his words muffled by his

pillow. "Try being graceful after you've poured your heart out to someone you love." The chuckling immediately stops from her side, but Jonathan appears to be drunk from fatigue. "Though you probably could, you being you and all..." Whatever words he wants say next fade out as he drifts out of consciousness and into sleep.

Nancy's chest softens at that and she sits herself on the side of his bed, careful not to wake up him. She reaches out and brushes the long strands of his hair away from his face. He looks peaceful, like he didn't just break down when she told him that she cared about him.

She takes him in for a good minute before she stands back up and walks out of his room, giving him one last glance before leaving.

She collects her purse from the living room and tiptoes to the front door, where she is surprised by Joyce Byers, who looks startled before realizing it's Nancy.

"Nancy! I didn't realize you were coming over. I would've bought some extra groceries for tonight's dinner."

Nancy offers the older lady a polite and slightly sheepish smile. "Thanks Ms. Byers, but I just came over to tell Jonathan something. I'll be leaving now, actually." She steps around Joyce into the cold air outside.

"Oh," Joyce utters, sounding genuinely disappointed. "If you don't mind, you *can* expect a official invitation to have dinner with us soon. I know you've become friends with Jonathan, and I'd love to get to know you a little better. We'll invite Mike too, we can invite the whole gang! It'll be fun."

Nancy keeps the smile plastered on her face, briefly thinking about what it'd be like to make doe eyes (because she will, she knows she will) at Jonathan all evening while her mother, and his mother notice, and Mike will *not* stop lightly kicking her under the table, knowing exactly what is going on. That boy was too aware for his age. "Yeah, it could be fun. Have a nice day."

When Jonathan wakes up a good six hours later, he still remembers

everything that had happened that day. He even looks around his room, but of course she went home. He pushes himself off of the bed and grunts a little painfully, still unable to wake up feeling well-rested. He drags his feet to the kitchen where he finds his mom, who tells him that Will is already sleeping and mentions something about running into Nancy.

Jonathan plops down on the chair and groggily rubs his temples, groaning every so slightly.

"You okay, sweetie?" Joyce inquires, knowing her son well enough to know that he's having a rough day. She turns around fully and rests against the kitchen counter, giving him a worried look. "Does this by any chance have anything to do with Nancy coming over today?"

He leans back in his seat and averts his eyes. She might as well know, right? "I guess Nancy kind of took me by surprise today. I mean, I know we're friends, and friends care about each other, but this is the first time she actually said it. She actually came over to tell me that I matter to her."

"I believe her." Joyce softly replies.

"What?"

"I believe that she really cares about you. And I hope that you believe that too."

He knows that she means well, but it sounds different, coming from his own mother. She is already supposed to be on his team, so when it comes down to it, what she thinks doesn't really matter, right? At least, that's what the voices are telling him.

He wants to shut them up, but he can't. So he decides to distract himself by getting up and moving to the telephone. "I'm going to call her."

The Wheelers seem like a big family, Jonathan thinks to himself, when he first hears Mrs. Wheeler on the line, who then passes it to Mr. Wheeler, who accidentally hands the phone to Mike until Mike

finally realizes that Jonathan is calling for Nancy.

"Jonathan, hi!" The way she sounds honestly delighted to hear his voice makes his chest flutter.

"Hi Nancy." He loves saying her name.

She lowers her voice a little. "Are you okay?"

He's silent for a while and bites his bottom lip before continuing. "I'm fine. I guess I also can't help but feel a bit relieved. Because of all the people I could've opened up to, I'm glad it was you. I trust you."

"I'm so glad you do."

"I didn't get a chance to ask you what you meant by 'something'."

"Something?"

Jonathan presses his eyes shut, gathering the courage. "You said that there was something between us." The voices in his head grow louder.

This is it. This is the moment where she takes it all back. Or she's going to tell you that you misunderstood her.

Either way, this is going to blow up in your face and you might have to consider moving to Canada.

"I did say that," her voice is oddly soothing on the other end of the line. "and I meant it. I have feelings for you, Jonathan. And I don't think I'm mistaken when I say that you have feelings for me too. Don't ask me what they are though, 'cause I haven't gotten to the point of figuring it out just yet. All I know is that if you're willing, we kind of owe it to ourselves to figure out what this means."

It's all so surreal. Hearing her say these words to him makes him want to grab hold of something because he fears he might float out of his own body and drift away into space. But he feels the way gravity is keeping his feet on the ground and listens to pulse of his heartbeat and remembers that it's all very much the real world. He hums into the telephone, more to himself than to her. "I guess we have a lot to

talk about."

"We do." She agrees. "How do you feel about discussing this with some lunch tomorrow?"

"I would love that."

They talk about a lot the following day. Jonathan feels a bit more comfortable with her now that she's seen him cry, and he actually does let her peek into what goes on inside his head, just for a moment. He doesn't give away too much yet, because he thinks it's too soon and too dramatic. Too depressing.

She won't stop telling him that she's going to help him as much as he can, that she believes that he can get to a point where he'll genuinely love himself. She tells him that when he gets there, she wants to be by his side. She tells him that she wants him by hers, because she feels stronger knowing that he's got her back. She tells him that much like when they were fighting the monster from the Upside Down, she's going to do everything in her power to help him fight the intangible monsters in his head.

"The voices you're hearing in your head, *they're not you*. They're like monsters, but they're not you. They're not a part of you."

She tells him all of that, and the voices in his head are still saying things in an attempt to devalue her promises.

But they're not yelling, and Jonathan knows it's a step forward.

And for the first time in years, he actually has some hope for the future. He doesn't know what to expect from it, but with Nancy by his side, perhaps it not as terrifying as he'd initially thought.

Author's Note:

I tried to do this fic justice, but eventually I just had to end it because I became tired. You know? I'll continue my other fic as well, but I also have an au in the works that will make me feel better, maybe. I just want Jonathan to be okay. I'm so tired.